

Oral Health

Summary:

In rural Missouri, preventative oral health may be difficult for many children to access. Local public health agencies (LPHAs) build partnerships and leverage resources to provide access where there otherwise would be none.

Detailed Story:

The Ozark County Health Department has provided dental education to WIC clients, daycares, and head start kids but knew the need was much greater than we could provide.

In 2008, the Smiles for Ozark County Kids program, through a grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health to the Ozark County Health Department, expanded services to provide dental exams, cleanings, and sealants at a local dentist office in Gainesville. As the grant did not cover the cost of dental repairs, the local newspaper shared information with the community about the need for donations to cover these costs.

This grant covered busing the children to the dentist for exams, cleaning, and sealants. The health department's health educator provided school-based dental education about oral health, nutrition, sealants, and tobacco. The original goal was to serve six schools in two counties, but a total of ten schools in five counties over four years were served. Pre- and post-tests were done for each grade level to measure learning from the dental education. Beginning with grades 2, 3, and 7, additional grade levels were added until grades 2 through 8 were served. Additionally, we partnered with Delta Dental to provide dental screening and education at the back to school fair.

Each child's dental care was tracked; parents received a letter with their child's dental visit results. The dental coordinator called each parent assuring their child's needs were met for dental care follow-up.

Planning for sustainability of the dental service was critical. In 2012, as a result of partnerships, a local dentist and her staff began visiting Douglas, Ozark, and Wright County schools with portable dental set-ups and continued to provide dental service such as exams, cleaning, sealants, oral health education, and some dental repairs such as fillings. The dentist provides parents with a letter of the results of their child's care. The dentist receives private donations to sustain the dental program and is also a provider of MO HealthNet for Kids.

Through this program, children and parents have increased their knowledge of the importance to their child's sealants and oral health care. Parents know our community dentist is now providing services in Ozark, Douglas and Wright counties.